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# Homework completion program in Atlantic County, NJ: The first five years

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## Abstract

This research examined the Homework Completion Program in Atlantic County, NJ, where college students and police officers tutored children with homework. Children (*N* = 154) reported their impression of police officers and perception of the program. Across 5 years and three program sites, children chose completing homework as the best part about the program and they mostly reported feeling happy when seeing a police officer and finding police officers if they needed help. In summary, the program has shown promise in achieving the goals of preparing children for a college education and building trust between children and police officers.

## Keywords

School-age children, homework completion, community policing, college preparation

When it comes to preparing socioeconomically disadvantaged children for a college education as well as building trust between children and police officers in disadvantaged neighborhoods, even accomplishing just one of the two can be daunting. Yet both are important for building better communities. Helping children with completing homework can prepare them for a college education, and enlisting local police officers to tutor children in homework completion has the potential to build trust between children and police officers. The Homework Completion Program in Atlantic County, New Jersey utilized this exact innovative strategy.

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Empirical research indicated that homework completion provided the context for the development of self-regulation (Warton, 1997). In this study of 98 Australian children, younger elementary school aged children (i.e., 2nd graders) were compared to older elementary school aged children (i.e., 4th and 6th graders). Based on children's self-reports, Warton (1997) found that when it came to homework completion, younger elementary school children tended to be externally regulated (e.g., completing homework because of teacher's expectations), whereas older elementary school children became internally regulated (e.g., completing homework because of the need to learn). Internal- or self-regulation is an important principle for being a responsible individual and a critical marker for college degree obtainment (e.g., Firmin and Gilson, 2007).

In addition to supplying a context for the development of self-regulation, homework completion also has an important role to play in improving children's academic performance. Academic performance, even as early as during the elementary school years, has been found to significantly predict later college attendance and bachelor's degree attainment among disadvantaged minority children (e.g., Ou and Reynolds, 2014). Related, Lee et al. (2017) provided empirical support for the importance of homework completion in academic achievement. They evaluated an afterschool program in northern California run by a local non-profit organization called EdVenture. The study's final sample composed of 32 elementary school aged children who were mostly low-income and of Hispanic or African American descent that participated in EdVenture's afterschool program. Information about children's attitudes, behaviors, and school progress were collected twice, in the beginning and toward the end of a school year. Interestingly, whereas program involvement and changes in self-efficacy (i.e., perceived ability to do well and receive good grades in school) did not correlate with changes in reading achievement, changes in homework completion predicted changes in reading achievement. The more children completed homework, the higher their reading achievement. As a result, Lee et al. (2017) concluded that homework completion might be an important means to achieve the ends of bridging the reading achievement gap between ethnic minority children from disadvantaged background and their majority middle-class counterparts.

Indeed, the benefits of homework completion extend beyond the elementary school years, as homework completion also positively associated with school grades in a sample of middle-school students with learning disabilities (Hughes et al., 2002). Further, strategies to encourage homework completion in middle schoolers both with and without learning disabilities seemed effective (e.g., Hughes et al., 2002; Merriman et al., 2016). Hughes et al. (2002) gave direct instruction on homework completion strategy to nine 12- to 15-year-old middle schoolers with learning disabilities. Eight children mastered the strategy and increased their rate of homework completion and the quality of homework products (Hughes et al., 2002). Similarly, in a study involving 50 6th to 8th graders (both with and without learning disabilities) who had substantial difficulty completing homework, Merriman et al. (2016) found that both the homework center and group coaching strategies were effective in reducing children's problems with homework completion. Finally, a university-middle school mentoring program was found to improve participating children's completion of homework assignments, among other things such

as improved sustained attention and classroom test scores (Russ, 1993). Of course, in addition to strategies, other factors such as motivation and engagement also promote homework completion in high school and college students: In a study sampling from 624 elementary school students, 21,579 high school students, and 420 college students in Australia, Martin (2009) revealed a lopsided U-shaped developmental function in that elementary school students were the most motivated and engaged in schoolwork, followed by college students, with high school students being the least motivated and engaged. Therefore, taking advantage of elementary school students' high motivation and engagement may pay special dividend, something the Homework Completion Program did as the program focused on helping students with homework completion in elementary school.

In short, the Homework Completion Program in Atlantic County, New Jersey is an evidence-based intervention to strive for the goal of preparing children for a college education. Moreover, having police officers serve as tutors in the Homework Completion Program holds promise as an effective strategy to reach the goal of building trust between children and police officers.

The backdrop for inviting police officers to serve as tutors for children rests on the concept of community policing. Forman (2004) defined community policing as an organization strategy involving citizens at the neighborhood level to regularly meet with local police force to discuss crime problems and set priorities; further, citizens at the neighborhood level are willing to take responsibility for helping to problem solve. The goal of community policing is the strengthening of police–community relationship so that neighborhood citizens and local police officers start to see each other as allies to effectively fight crimes. Community policing utilizes a variety of different tactics, from attending/organizing neighborhood prayer vigils, to playing basketball with children in public housing projects, to smiling at infants. For community policing to succeed, community involvement needs to be broad and deep. Forman (2004) concluded that community policing is especially needed for young people in socioeconomically disadvantaged neighborhoods such as in the inner cities. Drawing upon Forman's (2004) arguments, police officers helping children with homework is one tactic of community policing. Indeed, Arter (2006) concurred that police officers serving as mentors for children is a logical next step in the community policing continuum, as the strategy can be effective and efficient in inculcating legitimacy to police officers, police departments, and the law enforcement profession.

Two empirical studies (i.e., Salmi et al., 2000; Thurman et al., 1993) supported the contention that having police officers serving as tutors for children can build trust between children and police officers. Thurman et al. (1993) evaluated a community demonstration project called Community Opportunities Program for Youth (COPY Kids) involving 315 children with a median age of 13. The 8-week program was designed for economically disadvantaged children in Spokane, Washington. Police officers in the project interacted with the at-risk children weekly and in a non-threatening way to expose children to positive role models and various pathways to success. The officers dressed in plain clothes in the beginning. Later, they dressed in patrol uniforms. The officers had lunch with the children, accompanying the children to visit local landmarks (such as parks and museums)

before or after lunch. After analysis of direct observations of the program, focus group interviews with children, and surveys of parents and staff, Thurman et al. (1993) found positive program outcomes for participating children, parent, and police officers. Specifically, five children revealed in focus groups that COPY Kids changed their impression of Spokane Police Department in a positive direction. In addition, 36% of the parents/guardians reported that COPY Kids led them to form a more positive outlook about the Spokane Police Department.

Salmi et al. (2000) surveyed 3271 adults and 986 adolescents from two cities in Finland with a 147-item questionnaire and built a model for police image and police visibility using structural equation modeling. An important marker of police–community relationship is the community's perception of police, or police image. In this research, Salmi et al. (2000) proposed that police visibility was an important determinant of police image. Whereas police visibility could mean different things such as seeing police directing traffic on the streets or interacting with police officers during routine traffic stops, Salmi et al. compared police visibility through either police patrolling in cars or police patrolling on foot. Police image, on the other hand, was measured by friendliness (e.g., safe, not frightening) and closeness (e.g., familiar, not strange) ratings. The pattern of participants' answers on the questionnaire showed that for both adults and adolescents, seeing police patrolling on foot was positively correlated with police friendliness and closeness ratings; in contrast, seeing police patrolling in cars was negatively correlated with police friendliness and closeness.

Synthesizing across Salmi et al. (2000) and Thurman et al. (1993), it seems apparent that similar to police officers serving as mentors in the COPY Kids project and police patrolling on foot, police officers tutoring children in homework completion is regular positive interaction between police officers and children and an activity where police officers are on-foot, visible, and personable. These elements should build trust between children and officers, augment police image, and improve police–community relationship.

To recapitulate, the current research sought to examine the process and outcome in the first 5 years of the Homework Completion Program in Atlantic County, NJ to describe the nature and scope of the program and assess the program's effectiveness in reaching the goals of preparing children for a college education and building trust between children and police officers.

## Method

### *Participants*

From the fall semester of 2014 to the spring semester of 2019, 640 mostly African American and Hispanic school-age children and adolescents (from pre-kindergarten to the 12th grade) participated in the Homework Completion Program in Atlantic Country, New Jersey. Table 1 presents information on the number of participating children by academic year and program site.

**Table 1.** Number of participating children by academic year and program site ($N$ = 560).

| Year | Stanley Holmes | Buzby Homes | Pleasantville | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2014–2015 | 63 | — | — | 63 |
| 2015–2016 | 52 | 59 | — | 111 |
| 2016–2017 | 53 | 56 | — | 109 |
| 2017–2018 | 71 | 68 | 15 | 154 |
| 2018–2019 | 41 | 56 | 26 | 123 |

## Materials and procedure

Homework Completion Program in Atlantic County, New Jersey was a collaboration that started between the Stockton Center for Community Engagement and Service Learning (SCCESL) at Stockton University in Galloway, New Jersey, the Atlantic City Police Department (ACPD), and the Atlantic City Housing Authority and Urban Redevelopment Agency (ACHAURA).

### *Program sites and tutoring services*

The first program site in the inaugural academic year of 2014–2015 was at Stanley S. Holmes Village apartment complex (Stanley Holmes henceforth), a public housing unit in Atlantic City, New Jersey. Participating children at Stanley Holmes were all African Americans and initially ranged from 5 to 11 years (i.e., Kindergarten through the 6th grade) and in the third year expanded to 18 years. Times for the program were initially Monday to Friday from 3:00 p.m., to 5:00 p.m., (but were changed after the first year to from Monday to Thursday because children were typically not assigned homework on Fridays). Children received homework tutoring services at the community center of the apartment complex. This removed the roadblock of lack of transportation many after-school programs experience.

The second program site was added in the academic year of 2015–2016 at Buzby Homes Village (Buzby Home henceforth), another public housing apartment complex in Atlantic City. Participating children were mixed in race/ethnicity, consisting mostly of African and Hispanic Americans, including some Caucasian Americans. The children ranged from preschool/pre-kindergarten to the 7th grade (and expanded to 18 years starting in the following academic year). Times for the program were initially on Wednesdays and Thursdays (and expanded to 4 days from Mondays to Thursdays in later academic years) from 3:00 p.m., to 5:00 p.m., and children gathered at the Buzby Homes community center to receive homework tutoring services.

The third program site was started in the 2017–2018 academic year at the City of Pleasantville Community Room located in the Pleasantville Public Library (Pleasantville henceforth), the Pleasantville branch of the Atlantic County Public Library system. The Pleasantville site has been utilized almost exclusively by Hispanic children, with two African American children initially attending. We chose the term "Hispanic" to be

**Table 2.** Number of tutors by academic year and program site ($N$ = 857).

| Year | Stanley Holmes | Buzby Homes | Pleasantville | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2014–2015 | 170 (23) | — | — | 170 (23) |
| 2015–2016 | 126 (7) | 42 (3) | — | 168 (10) |
| 2016–2017 | 75 (9) | 67 (6) | — | 142 (15) |
| 2017–2018 | 98 (8) | 57 (5) | 34 (7) | 189 (20) |
| 2018–2019 | 56 (12) | 62 (9) | 70 (7) | 188 (28) |

*Note*: Numbers in parentheses were police officers serving as tutors.

consistent with Stockton University and relevant school districts' record keeping. This was also the first and only site where Pleasantville (instead of Atlantic City) police officers served as tutors. Children in the beginning (i.e., the Fall 2017 semester) received homework assistance on Wednesdays from 3:00 p.m., to 5:00 p.m., Soon, however, children and parents asked to expand the program to 4 days a week. Subsequently in the Spring 2018 semester, the program expanded to 4 days a week from Mondays to Thursdays. Table 2 summarizes information on the number of tutors by academic year and program site.

## *Program organization and enrichment events*

In addition to tutors who were students from Stockton University and police officers from either Atlantic City or Pleasantville, there were also SCCESL student fellows who served as leaders for the Homework Completion Program. In addition, there was a Stockton University student in charge of data analysis, supported by a criminal justice professor from the university.

In the fourth year of the program, two math professors from Stockton University presented to program staff (i.e., SCCESL student fellows and student tutors) on the best ways to provide support with math homework: These valuable strategies were applied promptly with the children. Other than tutoring children on homework, the Homework Completion Program in Atlantic Country, New Jersey also offered participating children a variety of enrichment opportunities. Table 3 is a summary of these enrichment events by academic year and program site.

## *Pillowcase workshop*

A criminal justice professor presented the American Red Cross Pillowcase workshop about personal and family preparedness, local hazards, and coping skills during a crisis. Needed essentials items were given to the children.

**Table 3.** Enrichment events by academic year and program site.

| Year | Stanley Holmes | Buzby Homes | Pleasantville |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2014–2015 | Pillowcase Workshop; Photography Classes; Halloween Party; Book Donation; Keeping Your Cool Seminar; *Ratatouille* Movie | — | — |
| 2015–2016 | Why Poetry Matters; Holiday Party; Marine Science Presentation | Book Donation; Holiday Party; Marine Science Presentation | — |
| 2016–2017 | Holiday Gifts; Why Poetry Matters; Graduation Party | Holiday Gifts; Why Poetry Matters; Graduation Party | — |
| 2017–2018 | Financial Literacy Workshop; Marine Science Presentation; School Necessities | Financial Literacy Workshop; Marine Science Presentation; School Necessities | Financial Literacy Workshop |
| 2018–2019 | Holiday Party and Gifts | Holiday Party and Gifts | Holiday Party and Gifts |

## *Photography classes*

An SCCESL faculty fellow (also an anthropology professor) found an Atlantic City photographer and teacher to teach children photography in a five-day workshop. Along with an arts professor, the photographer taught children creative and critical thinking skills and how to tell visual stories using photography.

## *Halloween party*

Stockton University students from Golden Key International Honour Society and Atlantic City Police Department (ACPD) donated costumes, games, crafts, snacks, and candies for a Halloween Party for the children. Children at the party were able to bob for apples, become a mummy, get their face painted, play spooky bingo, and decorate pumpkins and toy bats. Children also trick-or-treated at various tables. Newspaper (i.e., *The Press of Atlantic City*) reporters were also present.

## *Book donation*

Stockton University students from Golden Key International Honour Society donated books to the program. In addition, Stockton University students from a health sciences class with a service-learning component collected about 500 books and donated the majority to the Homework Completion Program (with a small selection of about 80 books donated to the nearby Boys and Girls Club of Atlantic City).

### *Keeping your cool seminar*

Children from the program visited Stockton University and attended a seminar called "Keeping Your Cool," focusing on anger management strategies. After attending the seminar, children toured the university.

### *Ratatouille movie*

Children watched the Disney animation movie *Ratatouille* together, learning how one could fulfill their dream regardless of where they came from. Thus, "you can't run away from who you are, but what you can do is run toward who you want to be" (Reynolds, 2016, p. 155).

### *Why poetry matters*

Stockton University students from a Professor of Writing and First-Year Studies's class worked weekly with children to teach children about poetry through game playing and writing prompts.

### *Holiday party and/or holiday gifts*

The Eta Sigma Delta Hospitality Honor Society held a Krispy Kreme donut fundraiser and raised about $300. The money was used to purchase gifts for children at their holiday party near the end of the year: Children received educational activity books, art activities, small toys, and holiday candies. One year a Stockton University student organized a successful toy drive among the Atlantic City bartenders, providing over 100 holiday gifts to the children. In the 5th year of the program, in a partnership between SCCESL and non-profit charitable fundraising organization Four Atlantic City By Atlantic City (4AC × AC), funds were raised to purchase toys, and the toys were distributed at the program's holiday celebration parties for the children in December.

### *Marine science presentation*

An SCCESL faculty fellow (also a biology professor) conducted Marine Science presentations to participating children in the program.

### *Graduation party*

As children in the program graduated from middle schools to attend local public high schools, graduation parties were held, co-sponsored by SCCESL, the Atlantic City Housing Authority and Urban Redevelopment Agency, ACPD, and Chartwells Dining Services. Atlantic City dignitaries such as the mayor, police chief, police sergeant, police officer, local high school staff, and/or member of Atlantic City Council often attended the parties.

### Financial literacy workshop

After SCCESL was awarded a $10,000 grant from TD Charitable Foundation, TD Bank's WowZone financial literacy workshops were conducted. The workshops taught children and youth about budgeting, saving, and credit building.

### School necessities

SCCESL held numerous "Pop-Up Pants Shop" events. Children and parents were invited to "shop" for community donated school uniform pants. As children and parents showed up at the events, children were given free backpacks and school supplies and parents were encouraged to register their children for the Homework Completion Program for the upcoming academic year.

### Program assessment questionnaire

To assess whether the Homework Completion Program was effective in its first 5 years in achieving the goals of preparing children for a college education and building trust between children and police officers, a five-question survey with color pictures was used. The survey was created by the then Director of Assessment at Stockton University, a psychology professor. The first question asked: "How do you feel when you see a police officer?" Child could choose one or more from four facial expression images, a smiley, a neutral, a frowning, and a crying face.

The second question asked: "What does a police officer do?" Children could choose one or more from four images. The first showed a photo of two police officers, one holding a girl's hand and the other holding a boys' hand, representing "helping." The second picture showed the silhouette profile of a police officer squatting down and "shooting" a handgun. The third was a photo of police officers "arresting" someone, and the fourth showed a photo of a police officer pointing his handgun at a few people lying on the floor, suggesting "killing."

The third question was "Who would you try to find if you needed help?" Children could choose one or more from five images: The first showed two parents holding a child's hand, suggesting "parents." The second showed a group of children, indicating "friends." The third showed a police officer squatting down to talk to a girl, with the caption of "Police officers are your friends. They want to help you" finely printed at the bottom of the image. This represented the choice of "police officers." The fourth image was the photo of a school "crossing guard." The final image showed a teacher writing on a green chalkboard, indicating "teachers."

The fourth question was "What is the best part of coming to the HCP (Homework Completion Program) at …?" The name of the program site would be inserted to where the ellipsis was at the end of the question. There were four images printed below the question, and children could choose one or more images. The first was an image of children playing with friends, the second was a photo of a child completing homework, the third was a photo of a few children having snacks, and the fourth image was the same

**Table 4.** Number of children who completed questionnaire and their answers to "what does a police officer do?" question by academic year and program site ($N$ = 154).

| Year | Stanley Holmes | Buzby Homes | Pleasantville | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2014–2015 | 15[a] | — | — | 15 |
| 2015–2016 | 13[a] | 15[b] | — | 28 |
| 2016–2017 | 12[b] | 16[b] | — | 28 |
| 2017–2018 | 19[b] | 27[a] | 9[b] | 55 |
| 2018–2019 | 14[a] | 8[a] | 6[ab] | 28 |

[a]Children that year from that site mostly thought that police officers help people.
[b]Most children that year from that site thought that police officers arrest people.
[ab]In the 2018–2019 academic year, top choices for children at the Pleasantville program site were police officers help people (50%) and police offers arrest people (50%).

used for the third question, showing a police officer squatting down to talk to a girl, with the caption of "Police officers are your friends. They want to help you" finely printed at the bottom.

The fifth and final question asked children to react to the statement of "I love coming to the community room in …!" The name of the program site was inserted to where the ellipsis was at the end of the statement. Children had three images to choose from to answer this final question: The first was an image of "no," the second was an image of "yes," and the third was an image of a child shrugging, with a question mark on the top of the child's head, suggesting "I don't know." Children could choose one or more images for this question as well.

## Results

The five-item program assessment questionnaire was administered once per academic year near the end of the spring term. Table 4 presents information about the 154 children who completed the questionnaire and how their answers to the question of "What does a police officer do?" compared by academic year and program site.

### *2014–2015 academic year*

In this inaugural year of the program, a sample of 15 children completed the questionnaire at Stanley Holmes program site: Most (exact numbers were lost due to a corrupt data file) children were happy to see police officers by choosing the smiley face; most said that officers help people; most would go to police officers if they needed help; most chose completing homework as the best part about going to the Homework Completion Program; and most reported loving to go to the community room at Stanley Holmes.

## 2015–2016 academic year

In the second year, 13 children completed the survey at Stanley Holmes and the results mirrored those in the first year: Most (84.6%) were happy to see police officers; most (53.8%) believed that officers help people; most (76.9%) would go to police officers if they needed help; most (53.8%) chose completing homework as the best part of going to the Homework Completion Program; and most (92.3%) reported loving to go to the community room at Stanley Holmes.

Interestingly, even though the 15 children sampled from Buzby Homes (being the first year for these children) responded for the most part similarly to their Stanley Holmes counterparts, there was a noticeable difference when answering the question of what a police officer does: Arresting people was endorsed by the most children (46.6%) at Buzby Homes.

## 2016–2017 academic year

Most children from both Stanley Holmes (75%) and Buzby Homes (68.8%) reported happy when seeing a police officer; children from Stanley Holmes (72.7%) and Buzby Homes (50%) mostly said that police officers arrest people; children from Stanley Holmes (75%) and Buzby Homes (87.5%) mostly chose to find police officers if they needed help; most children (Stanley Holmes: 58.3%; Buzby Homes: 62.5%) thought that completing homework was the best part about going to the Homework Completion Program; and most children (Stanley Holmes: 75%; Buzby Homes: 87.5%) loved going to the community room of their respective program sites.

One notable change this year was that like those from Buzby Homes, most children from Stanley Holmes also thought that police officers arrest people. In the previous 2 years, most children from Stanley Holmes believed that police officers help people.

## 2017–2018 academic year

Mirroring findings from the first three years, most children responded feeling happy when seeing a police officer, including 84.2% of the children from Stanley Holmes, 66.7% of the children from Buzby Homes, and 77.8% of the children from Pleasantville.

When asked about a police officer's job, the most often chosen answer was different across the three program sites: 57.9% of the children from Stanley Holmes said that police officers arrest people, so did 55.6% of the children from Pleasantville, but 74.1% of the children from Buzby Homes now said that police officers help people.

As for whom to find if they needed help, children most often chose police officers across the three sites: 78.9%, 55.6%, and 77.8% of the children from Stanley Holmes, Buzby Homes, and Pleasantville did so, respectively.

When asked about the best part about going to the Homework Completion Program, children from the three program sites answered differently: Top choice for Stanley Holmes (47.4% of the sampled children) and Buzby Homes (63%) was completing homework, but top choice for Pleasantville was playing with friends (44.4%).

As in the previous years, children (Stanley Holmes: 84.2%; Buzby Homes and Pleasantville: 100%) overwhelmingly reported loving to go to the community room of their Homework Completion Program sites.

### *2018–2019 academic year*

Children mostly responded feeling happy when seeing a police officer, including 100% of the children from Stanley Holmes, 50% of the children from Buzby Homes, and 100% of the children from Pleasantville. The other 50% of the children from Buzby Homes reported feeling neutral when seeing a police officer.

When asked about a police officer's job, 78.6%, 50%, and 83.3% of the children from Stanley Holmes, Buzby Homes, and Pleasantville, respectively, said that police officers help people, making it the most popular choice. Additionally, 50% of the Pleasantville children also said that police officers shoot and arrest people.

As for whom to find if they needed help, children once again most often chose police officers: 100%, 50%, and 83.3% of the children from Stanley Holmes, Buzby Homes, and Pleasantville did so, respectively.

When asked about the best part about going to the Homework Completion Program, completing homework was the most popular answer, including 100% of the children from Stanley Holmes and Pleasantville and 50% of the children from Buzby Homes. Further, 50% of the children in Pleasantville additionally chose spending time with police officers and eating snacks as the best part.

As in previous years, children mostly (Stanley Holmes: 100%; Buzby Homes: 50%; Pleasantville: 100%) reported loving to go to the community room of their Homework Completion Program sites, although 50% of the children from Buzby Homes also reported not knowing how they felt.

## Discussion

In this research, we examined the process and outcome of the Homework Completion Program in Atlantic County, NJ in the first 5 years. We described the nature and scope of the program and attempted to assess the program's effectiveness in reaching the goals of preparing children for a college education and building trust between children and police officers.

Children overwhelmingly chose completing homework as the best part about going to the Homework Completion Program: This was the most popular choice for children across all 5 years in all program sites except for the academic year of 2017–2018 at the Pleasantville site, where playing with friends was the most popular answer. However, the year after (i.e., the academic year of 2018–2019), every sampled child from the Pleasantville site chose completing homework as the best part about going to the Homework Completion Program.

In other words, participating children recognized the importance and value of completing homework. This was encouraging when considering Martin's (2009) research on how motivation promoted homework completion. Given Finney et al.'s (2018) finding

that perceived test importance led to higher test scores through increased effort, we can be confident that since children in the Homework Completion Program recognized the value and importance of homework completion, they were more likely to complete homework. Homework completion should in turn lead to improved academic performance (e.g., Hughes et al., 2002; Lee et al., 2017), laying a foundation for later college attendance and bachelor's degree attainment (i.e., Ou & Reynolds, 2014). Therefore, the Homework Completion Program in Atlantic County, NJ has indeed started to prepare children for a college education. An anecdotal evidence for the positive impact of the Homework Completion Program recently surfaced when a graduate of the first class of the program at Stanley Holmes site was accepted to attend Stockton University in the fall semester of 2021. The program graduate related the good news to the police officer who served as her tutor to inform the SCCESL director, a wonderful testament to not only the program's role in preparing children for college attendance but also in building relationship between the children and police officers.

It was therefore just as expected that there were also encouraging results regarding the second goal of building trust between children and police officers. First, across all 5 years and all program sites, children most often reported feeling happy when seeing a police officer, and they most often chose to find police officers if they needed help. This is reassuring because affection and trust often go hand in hand (Talley & Knight, 2005) and perceived helpfulness predicts a sense of trust (e.g., Rotenberg et al., 2005). When police officers are liked and deemed most helpful by the children, police officers are arguably also trusted by the children.

Second, when it comes to answering the question of what a police officer does, an intriguing pattern of answers emerged. At the Stanley Holmes program site, in the first 2 years of the program, children most often responded that police officers help people. In the subsequent 2 years, children mostly often thought that police officers arrest people. In the 5th year, most children believed that police officers help people. This showed that perception of police officer's main job duty fluctuated through the years at Stanley Holmes. At the Buzby Homes and Pleasantville program sites, however, children demonstrated the tendency through the years to change their answer from police officers arresting people to police officers helping people. A well-known motto for police forces is to "protect and serve," summarizing the duties of the police well (Akinlabi, 2017). Arresting people relates to the duty of protecting the public from crime, but it can also include innocent people getting arrested due to racial profiling. Helping people, on the other hand, addresses the duty of serving the public, or helping people in need. Put it differently, children's changing perception of police officers mainly engaging in the more controversial job duty of arresting people to the controversy-free job duty of helping people was a positive change when it came to increasing trust in the police force and improving police image. The probability that the Homework Completion Program in Atlantic County, NJ played a part in nourishing trust between children and police officers was hopeful.

In short, consistent with Salmi et al. (2000) and Thurman et al. (1993), police officers tutoring children in homework completion has helped to build trust and carries the potential to improve police image and police–community relationship. Children's

consistent feedback across years and program sites about loving to go the community room of their Homework Completion Program site adds to the overall assessment that the Homework Completion Program in Atlantic County, NJ has made positive strides in reaching the goals of preparing children for a college education and building trust between children and police officers in an environment filled with good cheer.

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